[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] WHEN YOU SEE YAZDI, PLEASE MENTION [illegible] WE WOULD APPRECIATE [illegible] THAT WE ANTICIPATE [illegible] CONSTITUTIONAL [illegible] AND WOULD BE IDEAL [illegible] STATEMENT OF [illegible] POLICY THAT [illegible] IN IRAN.

[illegible] STATUS OF JEWS AND OTHER MINORITY GROUPS. THERE IS CONCERN HERE THAT EXECUTION OF ELGHANIAN MAY LEAD TO ACTION AGAINST JEWISH COMMUNITY BECAUSE OF TIES WITH ISRAEL AND -ZIONISM.- THERE ARE MANY STORIES THAT NUMBERS OF PROMINENT JEWS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN ARRESTED. WE WOULD APPRECIATE CLARIFICATION AS TO FACTS AND POLICY.

(D) LEGAL STATUS OF ARMISH-MAAG PERSONNEL. IN CURRENT IRANIAN CONDITIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY COURTS IN OPERATION, SOME AMERICANS FEAR THAT DEPRIVING AMERICAN MILITARY ADVISERS OF THEIR IMMUNITY MAY PLACE THEM IN JEOPARDY. PLEASE NOTE THAT U.S. -IRANIAN BILATERAL AGREEMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT REMAIN IN EFFECT. IF IRAN IS TO SEEK U.S. MILITARY ADVISORY EFFORT IN THE FUTURE, WE WILL NATURALLY HAVE TO MAKE ADEQUATE ARRANGEMENTS TO PROVIDE FORPROTEC- TION OF PERSONNEL. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY CLARIFICATION YAZDI CAN PROVIDE ON THIS SUBJECT. VANCE

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1979/05/14

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

## (U) THE KURDS AND MOSCOW

### Summary

(U) Recent disturbances in Iran have again focused international attention on the Kurds and raised questions about Soviet support for their cause. Historically, a change of political climate in any of the five countries--Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and the USSR--containing large Kurdish minorities has led to shifts in the focus of Kurdish activities generally; despite tribal and ideological divisions, developments in one country have tended to affect Kurds everywhere.

(C) The Shah's fall from power changed the political and military balance in Iran and the Gulf and rekindled hope among Iranian Kurds for greater national autonomy. Neighboring states are now worried about the possibility of the unrest in Iran spilling over into their territories. At the same time, they are suspicious about Soviet policy toward the Kurds.

(C) While the Soviets have aided the Kurds occasionally in the past, there is no evidence that they are currently doing so. Indeed, Moscow has done its best to stay aloof of the present round of Kurdish unrest. In any event, since the early 1970's, Soviet state-to-state relations with all the countries involved have consistently taken precedence over the needs and interests of the Kurds.

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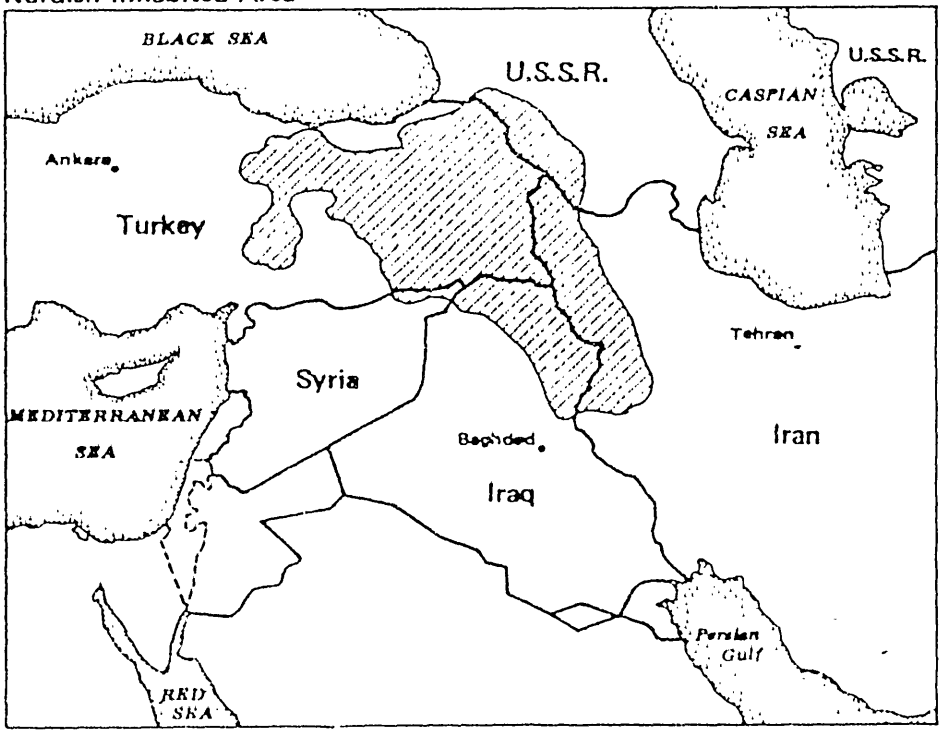
GDS 5/14/85 (Barar, R. H.)

Report No. 1179
May 14, 1979

Kurdish-Inhabited Area



## (C) Background

Recent disturbances in Iran have again focused international attention on the Kurds and raised questions about Soviet support for Kurdish separatism. Approximately 10-15 million Kurds inhabit the mountainous terrain that spans the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the USSR. The largest segment--about 5 million--lives in Turkey; the smallest--about 100,000--in Soviet Armenia. Most of these fiercely independent tribesmen are clustered in small villages dotting the scrub-covered hills of traditional Kurdestan (see map), but growing numbers--especially in Iraq and Turkey--have been attracted by the relative affluence in city life and joined the urban work force. In Iraq, many have been resettled in government-built villages where the army and security forces can better monitor their activities, which traditionally have included gun-running, smuggling, and banditry.

Historically, a change of political climate in any of the countries containing significant Kurdish minorities has led to shifts in the focus of Kurdish activities there. And despite the various tribal and ideological divisions among the Kurds themselves, developments in one country have tended to affect the Kurds living in neighboring states. In the 1920's and 1930's, Kurds in Turkey launched large uprisings against the secularist and centralizing drives of Ataturk, claiming the right of self-determination and statehood promised by the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. Since then, Iraq has been more of a focal point.

In the 1930's and 1940's, the influential Barzani tribe revolted against the Iraqi Government. Baghdad, with British aid, put down the revolt. In 1943, the late Mulla Mustafa Barzani fled to Iran, where in 1945 Kurds declared a Kurdish People's Republic in Kurdestan province. With the fall of the republic in 1946, Barzani took refuge in the USSR.

The Kurds in Iraq remained relatively quiet until 1958, when the fall of the Iraqi monarchy rekindled the dream of Kurdish self-rule. The new government, headed by Gen. Abdul Karim al-Kassem and aided by the USSR, pardoned the Barzani Kurds and permitted Mulla Mustafa Barzani to return. This truce was short-lived, however, and in 1961 Barzani once

again took his people into the hills. The Iraqi Kurds under Barzani were fairly isolated, receiving only limited aid from Iran. In addition, they were divided among themselves, with Barzani commanding the northern mountain tribes and the more urban-oriented Democratic Party of Kurdestan (DPK) under Jelal Talebani centered farther south. The Kassem government itself, however, was beset with internal problems and unable to direct full attention to its minorities.

Kassem's inability to deal with the Kurds was partly responsible for his downfall in 1963. The new Baath government promised the Kurds greater autonomy and even hinted that it might be willing to accept Kurdish demands that the new Iraqi constitution provide for a Kurdish vice-president, deputy chief of the armed forces, and one-third of the cabinet seats. But when Baghdad began to talk of uniting Iraq in some form with Syria and/or Egypt, the Kurds hardened their own demands for fear of being swallowed up by an Arab majority. In mid-1963, Iraqi forces attacked Kurdish strongholds. Once again, Barzani and his followers were saved by internal Iraqi dissensions; in the fall of 1963, the Baathist government fell and was replaced by a coalition headed by the Arif brothers.

The Arif brothers also tried to make peace with the Kurds, but their pan-Arab sentiments made this impossible. After an 18-month cease-fire, the central government attacked the Kurds. During the hiatus, Barzani had purged the DPK and forced many of his opponents to accept his leadership. At the same time, he made overtures to the Iraqi communists and to the Baathists, who, now out of power, were more willing to accommodate the Kurds. The purge of the DPK probably weakened the Kurdish military effort; in any event, over the summer and winter of 1965, the central government pushed the Kurds back into their mountain strongholds. In the spring of 1966, however, the offensive sputtered to an end and both sides accepted a cease-fire. The Arif government then offered Barzani new concessions which were quickly accepted. That cease-fire held for the next two years.

In 1968, the Arif government fell and the Baathists once again came to power. They attempted to split the Kurds by appealing to Jelal Talebani; when that ploy failed, they launched a new offensive which also foundered, owing to internal disorder and Iranian aid to the Kurds. In 1970, the central government put forward a 15-point plan offering the tribesmen autonomy in an area of northern Iraq, to go into effect in four years. Between 1970 and 1975, however, the Baathists managed to consolidate their hold on the

countryside and opened contacts with the Iranians. When the implementation date rolled around, Baghdad reneged on the 15-point plan.

The Kurds thereupon took up arms again, but this proved to be the last time. In 1975, Iran and Iraq reached an understanding; the Shah closed the border and cut off support, thus eliminating a major source of arms and sanctuary for the Kurds. With that gone, the Iraqis were able to subdue the Kurdish area with relative ease. In early 1979, Barzani, the rallying point for the Kurds for 30 years, died an exile in Washington.

(C) New Opportunities

The Shah's fall from power radically changed the political and military balance in Iran and the Gulf. In doing so, it rekindled hope among Iranian Kurds for greater national autonomy, if not independence. As the crisis grew, they became increasingly vocal and active in their demands for autonomy. Considerable stores of arms and ammunition passed into their hands, and the army and security forces became virtually inactive in Kurdish areas. In March and April, in clashes with central authorities, the Kurds demonstrated that the government in Tehran was still too weak to exercise any real authority over the Iranian Kurds and would probably have to consider concessions.

Thus far, however, the Kurds claim to want only cultural autonomy and a greater say in the daily running of their lives, not independence. But at the same time, they may be storing arms and ammunition in preparation for an extended guerrilla war if the political authorities fail to respond to their demands. They are hindered, however, by their lack of a paramount leader.

Both the Turkish and Iraqi Governments are worried about a revival of Kurdish activity in their countries due to events in Iran. Some Turks claim that Kurds in Turkey are being supported and armed by the Soviets and seek to join their comrades in Iran for the purpose of establishing an independent Kurdestan. Except for individual adventures, however, the Turkish Kurds did not react to Barzani's movement in Iraq, even during his periods of greater autonomy. The official Iraqi line is that the Kurdish problem is a thing of the past, the situation having been defused by Baghdad's policy of resettlement and granting the Kurds some economic concessions. US Embassy Baghdad believes that the Iraqis are simply ignoring the problem in the hope

it will disappear. Recently, Baghdad has dispatched additional troops into Kurdish areas to close off the border with Iran and keep an eye on things.

The Soviet Angle

(U) The Soviet-Kurdish relationship, if tenuous, is relatively old. Moscow probably first established contact with the Kurds in the early 1920's. Little resulted, however, because the USSR was far more concerned at the time with maintaining correct relations with both Turkey and Persia and countering British influence in the region. During World War II, the Soviets occupied part of Persia to curtail German activity there, insure that lend-lease convoys remained open, and again offset the British. In December 1945, the Soviets announced their support for the creation of an independent Kurdish People's Republic and refused to withdraw their forces from Iran as promised at the Tehran conference in 1943. But in the face of British and US objections, Moscow soon backed down and the Kurdish republic fell.

(U) With the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958, Moscow pushed for Barzani's return, perhaps with the hope that he might become a valuable asset in Iraq after his long exile in the USSR. At first, Barzani formed an alliance--probably on Soviet recommendation--with the Iraqi communists. By mid-1959, however, this alliance was dead and Barzani purged his Kurdish movement of all who were tainted with communist heresy. When the Kassem government in Iraq began its crackdown on the Kurds in 1961, the Soviets made no move to help. Although Moscow may have been disappointed with Kassem and the turn that the Iraqi revolution had taken, its relations with Baghdad outweighed in importance any ties to the Kurds.

(U) Moscow's effort to remain aloof became increasingly difficult after Kassem's fall. The new Baath regime was violently anti-communist. When fighting between the Kurds and central government forces broke out in 1963, the USSR openly sided with the Kurds. On Soviet urging, Outer Mongolia placed the Kurdish question on the UN agenda, and on May 6, 1963, Pravda expressed support for the "Kurdish struggle for autonomy" and accused the Iraqis of repression. Later, in June, Red Star accused the Baghdad government of practicing genocide on the Kurds. But Soviet support remained chiefly rhetorical, although the USSR during that period did cease supplying Baghdad with large amounts of arms.

(U) The Soviet position shifted again with the fall of the Baathists in November 1963. Propaganda support for the Kurdish cause tapered off somewhat. In addition, Moscow began to supply the Arif regime with arms on a relatively large scale. Throughout the five-year Arif rule, Moscow inched closer and closer to Baghdad and paid correspondingly less heed to the Kurds.

(U) When the Baathists returned to power in 1968, Moscow's working relationship with Baghdad continued to improve--especially with the formation of the United Front government, which included the Iraqi communists. The Kurdish question was not allowed to endanger state-to-state ties. Although Pravda on October 3, 1968, defended the Kurdish fight for greater autonomy as "just" and the following spring insisted that any arms given Iraq were not to be used against the Kurds, Soviet support for the Kurds evaporated with the signing of a Soviet-Iraqi friendship treaty in 1972. Barzani came to depend more and more on the Shah. By 1975, Moscow was doing nothing to help the Kurds in Iraq.

(C) Indeed, the entire Kurdish question seemed moot as far as the USSR was concerned until the fall of the Shah. Thereupon, many of the Kurdish leaders, including Jelal Talebani, who had contacts with the Soviets in the past, returned to Iran. Furthermore, the Tudeh Party, the Soviet-recognized Iranian communist party, is heavily Kurdish in composition; one of its centers of strength is in Iranian Kurdestan.

(C) Despite claims in the Turkish press that the Soviets are airlifting arms to the Kurds in Iran, there is no evidence that the Soviets are currently aiding the Kurds anywhere. Soviet media, especially the clandestine radio stations, the National Voice of Iran and Bizim Radyo, which is directed at Turkey, have expressed some sympathy for Kurdish aspirations, but Moscow has been careful to distance itself from the Kurdish separatism. It stresses that it opposes any move to dismember Iran. On April 13, for example, the NVOI emphasized that the new Islamic republic would guarantee the rights of all minorities. The next day, Pravda carried a similar message and denied that the USSR was in any way connected with national unrest in Iran. Soviet reporting on the violence in Kurdestan claimed in general that it was the result of insufficient minority knowledge of the new government's policies and of CIA meddling.

Prospects

(U) If history has taught the Kurds anything, it is that others consider their interests expendable, and that while the USSR may occasionally voice support for greater Kurdish autonomy, it will not risk its relations with Iran, Iraq, Turkey, or Syria to aid the Kurds.

(C) If the government in Tehran fails to reestablish control over Iran's outlying areas, or if the country descends into civil war or chaos, the Soviets may be willing to provide some covert aid. They would do so, however, only as a means of increasing their influence in Iran as a whole, not to aid the creation of an independent Kurdestan. As in the days before the Shah's fall, Moscow apparently recognizes that its main asset, the Tudeh Party, is too small and weak to be a significant force on its own and that tactical alliances with some of the nationalist groupings, including the Kurds, may be advisable.

(C) For the time being, however, the Soviets do not seem ready to make any real commitment, largely because they are not sure what direction the revolution in Iran is taking. They do not want to alienate the present government or queer the Tudeh's future by acting prematurely. Thus, Moscow will probably continue to support the notion of greater Kurdish autonomy in Iran, but not go beyond rhetoric in doing so.

(C) Should Turkey enter a period of economic and political instability, Moscow might be tempted to try to exploit the Kurdish issue there as well, but it would act only with extreme caution. Ankara can be expected to resent strongly even the slightest hint of Soviet meddling. Prime Minister Ecevit reportedly raised Birim Radyo's Kurdish language broadcasts with Soviet Premier Kosygin during his trip to Moscow last year. Otherwise, for the last few years, Moscow has done its best to allay Turkish suspicions of Soviet designs.

(C) Since the early 1970's, Soviet state-to-state relations with Iraq have consistently taken precedence over Kurdish interests. Given the Egyptian-Israeli treaty and Baghdad's emergence as a leader of the Steadfastness Front, this policy line is likely to persist. Should existing tensions in Iraqi-Soviet relations increase, however, and the Baathist government continue and intensify its anti-communist campaign, Moscow could again come to view the Kurds as a counter. But it is hardly likely to do so,

particularly because the Kurds, with the loss of Barzani, have no undisputed leader and focal point, and because Iraq's pacification program seems to have generally succeeded.

(U) Underlying the Soviet caution with regard to the Kurds outside the USSR inevitably is Moscow's growing awareness of the potential problem of its own minorities in Central Asia. While the 100,000 Soviet Kurds themselves hardly present a threat within the USSR, they could serve as an unwanted example for the Soviet Muslims.

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